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SUBJECT: The Changing Face of Voter Manipulation and Under-the-table Campaigning in Legislative Elections

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Southerners have differing expectations of the impact the new "single-member district, two-vote" election system will have on Taiwan politics when it commences in the January 2007 Legislative Yuan (LY) elections. One political leader told AIT/K that he believes it will make election manipulation more difficult. A political analyst disagreed, arguing the new system will merely increase the sophistication of vote-buying and other manipulation techniques. End Summary.

Voter Manipulation Could Disappear

¶2. (SBU) In a recent meeting with AIT/K, Pingtung County Vice Magistrate Chung Chia-bing explained that in previous "multi-seat district" LY elections, party workers manipulated votes through under-the-table voter allocation agreements (pei-piao) in order to get as many of their candidates elected as possible. Previously, party operatives worked via informal channels to spread votes evenly among multiple party candidates by telling their supporters to vote for different party candidates in the same district. In some cases, family members in a household would split their votes within their extended family to help their preferred party elect candidates who might otherwise lack enough local support to win an election. In this election system, vote-buying served as a motivating tool to convince party supporters to divide and allocate their votes to ensure the election of multiple party members in each district.

¶3. (SBU) Chung surmised that under the new legislative election system in which only one candidate will be elected in each district, voters will likely shift to strict party line voting patterns. Under the new electoral system there will be little incentive or need to buy votes, or "pei-piao," since each party has only one candidate running in an each district's LY election. Despite the simplified new electoral system, Chung argued that public opinion polling may no longer be reliable because increasing numbers of voters refuse to respond accurately or at all to survey phone calls.

With inadequate samples, the public opinion polls will likely remain as inaccurate as ever, he concluded.

Or Maybe Not: Campaigning With "Futures"

¶4. (SBU) On the other hand, National Chung Cheng University Prof. Soong Hseik-wen told AIT/K that competition in the reduced-seat legislative elections is so fierce that efforts to mobilize voters would go deeper into the grassroots electorate. Prof. Soong explained that in Chiayi County, DPP candidates often work with DPP

county magistrates to hold meetings with local businessmen and professional leaders to elicit their support. In these meetings, candidates typically request campaign support in exchange for promises to award bids in future projects and land transactions after land rezoning. This wheeling-dealing serves as both a means to solicit campaign finance contributions and a way to deliver votes by these people to safeguard their interests. Explaining that this kind of campaigning is very effective, Prof. Soong surmised that, with so much at stake in the new single-member districts, the phenomenon will increase in the upcoming January 2007 legislative election campaign. It is difficult, Soong concluded, for legal authorities to monitor this type of campaign tactic.

Thiele

Wang